TheVillage

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Issue #244 May 2024

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 244 May 2024

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Front cover: An orange-tipped butterfly, photographed by *Village* reader Dennis Brown

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Thank you! Bromsgrove District Council chairwoman Sam Ammar and Alvechurch Parish Council chairman Marc Worrall (front, centre) gave 'unsung hero' awards to villagers who go above and beyond in making life better for the community.

As parish councillors and staff watched on, the awards were presented to (front from left): Caren Battle and Sarah Palmer, of Alvechurch Library; Michael Davenport, for his efforts linked to St Laurence Church and Alvechurch Larder; Elwyn Williams, for his community litter-picking heroics; and Adrian Smith, for keeping parish footpaths clear and safe.

A sparkling service

SURPRISE NEW BUS ROUTE BRINGS VITAL LINK FOR VILLAGES

YOU WAIT years for a decent village bus service, then six a day come along all at once.

News that Diamond Buses has introduced a comprehensive service for the villages between Bromsgrove, Longbridge and Redditch was greeted as "brilliant" by Alvechurch and Barnt Green independent councillors, who have been part of district council efforts to improve public transport.

The new service features the 182, running six times a day from Redditch, via Bordesley, Rowney Green, Alvechurch, Barnt Green and Hopwood to Longbridge, continuing on via Cofton Hackett, Lickey, Marlbrook, and Lickey End to Bromsgrove bus station.

Then the 183 comes back on the same route to Redditch bus station five times a day. There had been just one bus a day previously on a less comprehensive route that did not include Longbridge.

Coun Alan Bailes, who organised an on-going survey into bus use and needs in the Alvechurch parish, told *The Village:* "We talked to Worcestershire County Council officers about setting up the district council survey, which they advised us on, and we also asked about the use of 106 money from housing developers intended for community transport.

"Then, out of the blue, Diamond Buses announced the upgraded service, subsidised by the county council.

"We had heard nothing about it until it was announced last month, but it was very welcome news."

Coun Bailes said the initial upgraded route missed out a few much-needed stops, such as on Blythesway, in Alvechurch, and Waterside Orchard, at Hopwood, but these had now been included.

Talks were continuing into including Alvechurch rail station and the Lewkner Homes in the route.

"It really is a brilliant service now and, dare I say it, once we get the rail station included, it is an integrated service," added Coun Bailes, who is a transport consultant when not being a councillor.

The new service was introduced on April 15 after a short delay to refine the route and buses run from Mondays to Fridays except bank holidays. To see the timetable and fares, go to www.diamondbuses.com

Station lifts 'in design stage'

DESIGN work on the installation of passenger lifts at Barnt Green station is to "continue into the spring", Network Rail told the parish council.

Once that is carried out, they will be able to give a "better idea of when we expect our engineers to start construction".

Network Rail staff were due to give an update to villagers at Barnt Green Annual Parish Meeting, after *The Village* went to press.

‘Back us’ for 30mph

VILLAGERS living on one of the busiest stretches of road in the area are hoping to get the police on their side in efforts to reduce the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph.

The single-lane length of road from the end of the Alvechurch bypass through Bordesley and into Redditch is notorious for speeds recorded and the number of large lorries using it as a short-cut. An initiative earlier this year to introduce a 30mph limit through Bordesley, backed by Worcestershire County Council highways officers, was blocked when police were not prepared to support it.

Now the current Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, John Campion, has agreed to meet residents to experience for himself the heavy traffic they have to endure.

The invitation was made by resident Karen Kilbride, on behalf of Bordesley Matters. She told *The Village*: “It will be great for the PCC to see first hand the problems the residents have to endure on a daily basis, which includes speeding traffic, air and noise pollution, as well as speeding HGVs endangering pedestrians using the adjacent footpaths along the road.

“We have the county council’s support to reduce the speed limit to 30mph through the village, however it appears the police are holding up the formal approval.

“With their support we can hopefully implement the new speed limit”, Karen added.

WE MADE IT! The ‘Two Old Tukkers’ Trevor Woolley, of Rowney Green, and Malcolm Douglas, of Alvechurch, celebrate completing around 2,500 miles from the top of India to near the bottom in a motorised rickshaw, often called a tuk-tuk. With a combined age of 133, they were among the more senior teams to take part in the 15-day Rickshaw Run, raising money for good causes along the way.

■ For more information and to add to their totals for charity, search for *Trevor Woolley* or *Malcolm Douglas* on Justgiving.com

‘Ghetto estate’ vetoed again

A VILLAGE estate of “affordable homes” has again been rejected by planning councillors.

This was a resubmission of plans for 34 homes for “social rental” on Green Belt land by the main roundabout in Hopwood.

The application was originally refused by Bromsgrove Planning Committee last November, when a number of members were concerned by the potential “ghettoisation” of residents in need of lower cost accommodation.

The grounds for refusal were, again, that being solely to create social housing did not outweigh the significant harm to the Green Belt the development would pose.

The development would also be unsustainable because of its distance from essential services.

The site has a long history of unsuccessful applications, including for a pub, warehousing, offices, a nursing home and various housing schemes.

■ BARNT GREEN Parish Council has, subject to the clarification of some matters, supported an application by Barnt Green Sports Club for planning permission to install three outdoor padel tennis courts.

THE NASCENT Alvechurch Men in Sheds group stepped up to the plate after organisers of village events to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings hit a snag.

Quotes for the manufacture of a beacon to be lit on the day were coming in at around £2,500, Coun Brett Shepherd told fellow parish councillors. But two skilled metal workers from Men in Sheds offered to construct one for just the cost of the materials – about £200.

The plan is to hold the whole event on June 6 at Alvechurch Cricket Club, with the beacon being lit at 9.15pm to the sound of bagpipers.

Picnic in the Park plans: See Page 18

A NON-STOP visit to Barnt Green railway station saw an expectant crowd gathering to welcome the *Great Britain XVI* steam locomotive on its journey north.

This was day two of a nine-day trip, which included the train heading to the Scottish Highlands.

Picture by Keith Woolford

Putting books in little hands

DID YOU know: one in four children in the UK do not own a physical book? Business partners Becky Henman and Stacey Scott (pictured, left) have made it their mission to ensure local children have access to read their very own book, *writes Keith Woolford*.

Becky and Stacey have already donated more than 100 books in the last few months through the "Look for a Book" scheme, where children search for books in the area like a treasure hunt.

These have been carried out locally including in Cofton Hackett and Lickey. Parents have responded positively saying the children are delighted to find and read the books.

The range of books in the local scheme are currently supplied by Usborne Books, however Becky and Stacey keen to welcome new local business partners in their quest to supply even more books.

The pair have also been fundraising for Birmingham Children's Hospital and have been involved in "The Buddy Bag" foundation.

Sponsored reads can result in schools receiving free books supplementing often limited budgets.

Future locations are posted on the dedicated Facebook site: Look for a Book Midland Bookworms.

Ready to Serve: Chair Terry Pauley and volunteer Janet Millward at Muntjacs Cafe at Blackwell Community Hall.

Warm welcome on menu at new cafe

A NEW community cafe is offering a warm welcome in a revamped village hall. Muntjacs Café has opened its doors at Blackwell Community Hall offering freshly ground coffee, homemade cakes and other refreshments.

The cafe, which will be open between 10am and 2pm every Saturday, is the first project following the installation of a £20,000 commercial kitchen.

Naomi Pauley, one of the organisers, said the new venture, run entirely by volunteers, was designed to enhance the village community and offer a guarantee of company for anyone around Blackwell who may be feeling lonely or in need of a chat.

"The hall exists for the community, to be a focal point for the village and provide a space for the people of Blackwell and the neighbouring areas to meet together," she explained.

MY RACE TO RECOVERY

Village athlete **Sam Boswell** was leading her Ironman UK age group by 40 minutes when pain slowed her to a walk . . . almost two years later, she tells of the cancer that brought a new challenge to her life.

Sam's book – available on Amazon.

Left: Sam holds a 5kg ball showing the weight of the tumour.
Right: Sam crossing the line carrying the unwelcome 'guest' in 2022.

YOU may have seen previous reports published in *The Village* magazine from my triathlon races, including Ironman and various World and European championships as part of Team GB.

In 2022, I entered Ironman UK, hoping to repeat my achievement in 2016 of winning my age group at this race and qualifying for the prestigious Hawaii Ironman.

The Ironman is a long-distance triathlon, starting with a 3.9km swim, followed by a 180km bike race and finishing with a 42km marathon distance run . . . only a win would qualify me for Hawaii.

I trained very specifically for this event and preparation went well. On race day, I was comfortably first in my age after the swim and cycling legs, with a lead of around 40 minutes on second place.

Surprisingly, at the age of 51, I was also sitting second lady overall. With the cameras on me in transition, I started the run feeling strong.

But heading up the first steep climb of the run, I felt a sharp pain in my abdominal area. I had not experienced anything like this in training, despite replicating the course as closely as possible.

The pain became worse further into the marathon, and my only option was to resort to walking. I finished second in my age and tenth woman overall.

Disappointed not to take first place, but recovering quickly, I decided to look forward to 2023 and go again.

The week after the race, I noticed a large mass in my abdominal area, where the pain had been. Thankfully, after swift action by my GP, I was referred for urgent scans, comforting myself with thoughts that it couldn't be anything too serious – I had just raced an Ironman!

Three weeks later, my husband and I were sitting in a consulting room being told I had cancer in my abdominal cavity. The shock was made so much worse by the fact we had to return home and break the news to our 16-year-old son.

I had surgery to remove a 5kg mass and spent two months in the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham recovering from the biggest surgery performed by this hospital.

The surgeons believe the cancer had been there for a long time and were shocked I had raced Ironman carrying such a huge cancer around.

Due to its size, it was necessary to lose a kidney, adrenal gland, part of my bowel, the psoas fascia, part of my abdominal wall and part of the aorta.

When I finally returned home, I was still suffering with considerable pain, with a drain fitted through my back and into my abdominal cavity and I walked with a constant stoop.

For months, I worked on my walking strength and improving my posture. Now, just over a year on, thanks to the incredible surgery performed by my consultant and the wonderful help and support from friends and family – and my sponsor Elliott Nash Ltd – I am back racing.

Having to pinch myself at the thought of this, I wanted to write a book on my experience, with the aim of giving hope and help to others.

Ironman, Me and the Big C covers how I ventured into Ironman racing, it details training and racing advice and then how I used my training methods to recover from the huge surgery and lengthy stay in hospital.

If I never race Ironman again, it really doesn't matter; so long as that thing never comes back, I will be happy.

But with hope and prayer, I am thrilled to be back training and even standing on a start line again with a number on my back.

The book is self-published and available on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle versions.

I hope it may help others, whether to provide confidence and advice to someone wanting to try a triathlon or someone struggling with positive thinking or recovering from illness.

I will also be creating a JustGiving page. If I stay clear and well, the hope is to complete some events and races to raise funds and awareness for Sarcoma UK and this very rare cancer.

Celebration time: Alvechurch FC players and staff enjoy victory on penalties against Evesham United in the final of the Worcestershire Senior Cup, held with pride (below) by manager James Fry. Pictures/***Ian Macvie***.

Season ends in style

Trevor Ball looks back over an up-and-down season for The Church.

After all the excitement of last season, the 2023/24 season started at a stifling hot Hitchin Town where a two-goal defeat only told half a story as Nantwi Ofusu was controversially sent off with the score still at nil-nil.

August was a tough month with matches against the eventual league champions and four clubs competing for the play-off places. The highlight being a 4-4 draw at home to Redditch United with Chong scoring a 94th minute equaliser from the penalty spot.

If goals are what you wanted September had it all: 4-1 defeat at Royston, 4-4 draw at home to Barwell, 5-2 defeat at Halesowen in the FA cup qualifying rounds a 2-2 draw at Berkhamsted followed by home wins against Leamington and Long Eaton United. After the Halesowen game manager Ian Long was relieved of his duties and assistant manager Richard Colwell and coach Matt Kirby took temporary charge.

October started brightly with victory away at Anstey Nomads in the FA trophy and an away win at Stamford. Unfortunately, this was the last victory we saw until January 9th with the exception of penalty shootouts. Our FA trophy hopes were dashed by a 0-1 defeat at home to Coalville Town.

The new management team of James Fry, Steve Hensel and Richard Batchelor were installed at the club as a new era began.

November started poorly losing on penalties to Boldmere St Michaels in the Birmingham Senior Cup followed by 1-1 draws against Bromsgrove and Kettering before a defeat at home to Leiston.

Four consecutive defeats in December saw the club drop down the league, but due to the demise of Nuneaton Borough, their results were declared null and void which did the club a big favour as the points were amended and only three clubs would be now relegated.

January was an amazing turnaround: four wins, including a 3-1 victory against Malvern Town in the Worcestershire Senior cup not only boosted the morale within the club but saw the club climbing up the league and away from the relegation zone.

The uplift in form continued into February with an away win at Long Eaton and beating Redditch United by penalties in the Worcestershire Senior cup-semi final being the highlights.

Unfortunately, March was a month to forget with just one victory at home to Stourbridge and five defeats seeing the club once again skirting with relegation.

April began with a disappointing defeat at Halesowen, where The Church were by far the better side, but victory at home to Bromsgrove Sporting secured the club safety from relegation and then a wonderful night at Evesham against Evesham United ensured that the Worcestershire Senior cup would be gracing the Alvechurch trophy cabinet for the forthcoming season.

With just one game to go it has been a roller coaster of a season, plenty of highs and lows and at the end of the season we'll all look back and say that's the life of a football fan, secure in the knowledge we'll be playing step three football next season with a trophy in the cabinet.

Enjoy your summer and we'll do it all again next season.

THE STOLEN CAR LIMIT

Dear Editor – I read with interest the article in your magazine regarding the Alvechurch parish meeting with the police commissioner and enforcement of the 20mph speed limit.

As a resident of this village I would like to say that many of us would like the ability to reach such velocity.

On opening our front doors, however, we often find our trusty steeds have disappeared overnight.

To be clear the rate of car thefts in our village has been exponential over the past 18 months and the response and investigation from West Mercia police below apathetic.

Whilst no doubt enforcement of the 20mph speed limit would swell the coffers of the police force and save countless lives, it does nothing to address the very real crime issues residents are facing which, as a victim myself, I understand only too well.

Concerned, Alvechurch

'Auto pay' parking let me down

Dear Editor – I read with interest the letter in the April edition of *The Village* warning drivers about erroneous parking penalty notices incurred as a result of parking at Barnt Green station.

I, too, received two penalty notices (£100 each) following parking at the station on two occasions during December last year. Before parking there, I opted to use the parking company's automated app-based payment system, provided my credit card details and enabled the app's "auto-pay" option on my phone.

Once this function was activated, the app stated that there was no need for me to do anything whatsoever when parking at the station. No need to even take the phone out of my pocket!

As a consequence, after parking there I fully expected my vehicle to be recognised by the ANPR cameras and my credit card to be charged accordingly upon my exit.

After receiving the two penalty notices in January, I checked my credit card account and was horrified to discover that no charges had been actioned for the two parking events. Clearly the ANPR cameras did not trigger the "auto-pay" function on the app. I did successfully appeal against the penalty notices, but not without significant hurdles to jump through and considerable stress.

Like many of these automated facilities, there is no means to speak to a human being when things go wrong and a non "tick-box" explanation of circumstances is required.

This made the appeal process unduly challenging and added to my anxiety.

I narrowly avoided a seriously unwelcome £200 fine right after Christmas and I urge drivers using the station parking automated payment system to take extra care and check that payment has actually been made before exiting.

Concerned resident
Cofton Hackett

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The deadline for the next issue is May 10th 2024.

WHERE'S VINNY?

CROWN MEADOW First School pupil, Aria Waller, aged eight, from Alvechurch shows off the Mini Vinny she won for finding the little creature in April's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village* magazine.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on the bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on May 7 2024. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Done deal on Alve-ditch

Dear Editor – I note the editor's well-put reply to the "vital village infrastructure" letter in April's edition,

Sadly, as Cofton Hackett saw, many, many promises by the developer resulted in nothing.

As pointed out, a lot of land surrounding Hopwood, Alvechurch and Cofton has already been optioned by house builders.

I do worry as you only have to look at the current Whitford Road Perry Fields house developments, Bromsgrove, where no extra road infrastructure has been forwarded.

As for Bromsgrove planning department I have no faith in them after what can only be described as a farcical blind eye with the former Marlbrook tip.

I've always said Redditch will link up with Alvechurch and Hopwood. As for affordable homes I don't see prices over £300,000 as affordable for your average young couple starting out.

I'm afraid "done deal" always comes to mind when ever I see the words Bromsgrove and development.

Richard Peplow
Cofton Hackett

Judging the juggernauts

Dear Editor – It was interesting to see the piece in *The Village's* March issue, where a lorry carrying 26 tonnes of wood became stuck on narrow Callow Hill Road bridge.

I was thinking just last week that juggernauts should be stopped from thundering through the village along Red Lion Street and Swan Street).

It is a village and they *should* be made to use the bypass.

Resident, Alvechurch

Seeing blue

Dear Editor – I seem to recall concerns expressed in *Village Views* with regard to the contentious ongoing issue of exceptionally bright street lamps in Alvechurch, much to the anger of residents.

When I first moved over to Northfield in 1957, from Castle Bromwich, gas lights were installed and after dark they were never too bright but gave out a warm and friendly glow. Sadly they were replaced in the 1960s by electric street lamps which didn't look the same, but cheap and nasty!

May I respectfully propose that the street lamps which are causing a serious measure of concern, be replaced by replica gas lamps which are in fact LED lights of a similar light output to gas, would look better and deal with this issue of too much light!

Modern car headlights which give off a blue white glare should be a fail on MOTs and I'm astonished the Department of Transport have, to date, done nothing about it. The law is quite clear, headlights and side lights should be yellow, not blue!

So folks, put pen to paper and complain to your local councillor or Member of Parliament as soon as possible.

John Ridarta
Cofton Hackett

Letters Continue Overleaf

continues from previous page

On a slippery path to Hopwood

Dear Editor – I know the weather is hopefully improving after the very wet spring we've experienced recently. . . but I'd love to be able to walk along the canal to Hopwood all year round.

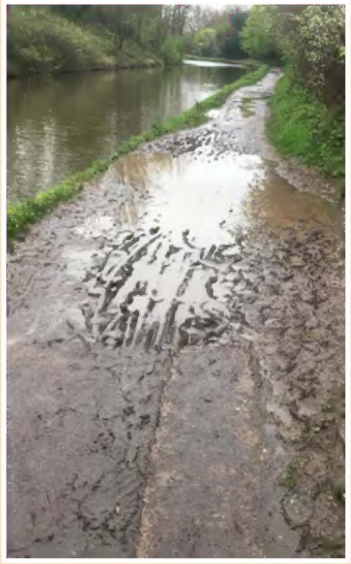
Currently it is too slippy for me to attempt this, due to the mud and puddles.

I know we live in the countryside so I expect some mud, but it would be amazing to continue the hard standing between The Weighbridge and Callow Hill Road, along to Hopwood for many to enjoy.

So, I ask if you feel the same and also have difficulty walking along the canal path towards Hopwood (or further!) from the bridge on Callow Hill Road, Alvechurch contact the Canal and River Trust.

Their free phone number is 0303 040 4040 where you can leave a message or you can visit their website www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us

Concerned resident
Alvechurch



Above images: A wet and muddy towpath along the canal.

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Springing into May

VHK WOMENS HEALTH

As the days grow longer, Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic**, advise how fitting exercise into your day can help with a range of health conditions, and how they can support you.

A giant leap for women's healthcare: Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs are here to support women with a range of health concerns.

THE evenings are finally getting longer with the clocks going forward at the end of March and now is the perfect time to think about your movement.

Throughout life, movement offers widespread health benefits but none so visible than in midlife.

The Department of Health and NICE recommend 150 minutes of exercise a week that makes you slightly out of breath, in bouts of at least 10 minutes at a time or 75 minutes of significant physical exercise a week that causes you to breath hard or increases the heart rate. But any exercise or movement is beneficial.

For midlife women there is a wealth of evidence-based information confirming how exercise can improve menopausal symptoms.

All forms of physical activity have been shown to reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms along with improving Menopausal Quality of Life Scores (MENQOL) and reducing the overall impact of menopausal symptoms on women.

Further studies have shown an improvement in sleep with higher levels of physical activity including yoga, walking or stretching and just 10 minutes of stretching a day has been shown to reduce insomnia for peri- and postmenopausal women.

Joint pain is a common menopausal symptom, that may deter activity during menopause, so it is good to know that some small studies have shown a significant reduction in joint pain in women carrying out stretching, gym-based activity and even aerobic activity and will reassure us that exercise is not causing harm.

Many women ask what is the best form of exercise to do during midlife – and to that we have a pragmatic approach – because the best exercise to do, is exercise that you enjoy. Exercise that you can fit into your busy lifestyle and that you will stick to and make habit forming.

All exercise and movement is great for the body, including when at work taking the stairs instead of the lift or taking phone calls standing instead of sitting at a desk.

Outside of work trying to walk, even for ten minutes a day is a great place to start. Ideally a combination of cardiovascular exercise like aerobics, cycling, jogging or swimming twice a week along with strength training and stretching such as yoga or Pilates offers the ideal mix.

We recommend considering exercising with a friend or in a group – committing to exercise with others is not only sociable and emotionally rewarding but also helps with motivation and reliability.

Find a time in the week that works for you and diary entry it – so that it holds an importance in your week – this is a commitment to yourself, your wellbeing and your long term health so try to look at it in a positive action for you and not something that is cancelled for other less important activities.

And of course, no midlife exercise plan is complete without the mention of pelvic floor exercises! We recommend pelvic floor exercises for all women but in midlife the pelvic floor strength often deteriorates and this can impact on urinary control and the ability to exercise – we recommend daily exercises and the NHS website can give you more detailed information about how to do these.

VHK Women's Health clinic is here to offer support in all aspects of Women's Health and Menopause care. If you would like more information, please see our website: www.vhkwomenshealth.com vhkwomenshealthclinic@gmail.com Appointments are also available, which can be booked at www.vhkwomenshealth.com

Chatterley for the community

CHATTERLEY
FACILITY AND GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Sam Chatterley tells *The Village* about the Cofton Hackett-based maintenance company dedicated to helping villagers and communities with their homes and businesses. **Chatterley Facility and Grounds Management** know the importance of first impressions and ensure a high quality service in all that they do.

CHATTERLEY Facility and Grounds Maintenance, established in 2019, is a family-run business which, along with providing outstanding service for their private and commercial customers, has a passion for creating jobs within the local community.

Sam Chatterley, the owner and CEO, set up the small business following 23 years working at Cadbury in various management roles. He explained: "After taking redundancy, I set up the business with no idea what I would do with it.

"I'd always been keen on doing work in the community, having previously chaired Bournville Works Housing Society before moving to Cofton Hackett.

"When Cofton Hackett Village Hall was built in 2019, I applied to take on the management contract."

Sam and the team were successful in their application and currently manage the end-to-end solutions, from bookings to cleaning and maintenance.

Chatterley has recently expanded to take on a wider variety of work. Sam said: "Last year we decided to expand into the grounds and gardening business with the help of my good friends Tony and Mark.

"We quickly realised that there was a market for a local facilities management company that can provide both commercial and domestic services."

The team at Chatterley have an unwavering commitment to excellence in what they do, and pride themselves on being a trusted source for top-notch property maintenance and facility management services in the area.

Chatterley are proud to offer an outstanding range of services in the community and are dedicated to providing the best price and quality maintenance around.

"We encourage schools, and community hubs to reach out to us if they are interested in our services as we aim to beat any commercial quote or provide a better service for the same value," Sam told *The Village*.

The Chatterley team hard at work at Blaise Vetinary Referral Hospital.

Tony in action as he strims a client's grass.

Sam Chatterley set up the business to provide excellent services for local people and the community.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Chatterley know that first impressions matter, and they offer an array of commercial grounds maintenance services tailored to your specific needs.

Their services both maintain your business's premises, while also enhancing its appeal to potential customers and employees, and leave a lasting impression on anyone who views them.

The dedicated team of gardeners and groundspeople are passionate about delivering the best grounds maintenance service to clients; whether it's fully designed, landscaped grounds or just cutting the lawn and tidying flowerbeds, Chatterley promise to leave the space in tip-top condition.

Speaking of their team's dedication to their work, Sam said: "Our head gardener is passionate about lawns, he loves to take a tired, patchy, lumpy lawn and turn it into a lusciously green & level lawn that you would expect to see at Kew Gardens."

The team offer a range of services including:

■ **Grass and Lawn Care:** Their expert team will ensure that your grass and lawns remain lush and healthy through regular cutting, specialised treatments, and even reseeding if necessary. They can also undertake full land returfing when required.

■ **Hedge and Bush Trimming:** If your property features hedges or bushes, the team will keep them neatly trimmed and well-maintained to enhance the elegance of your grounds. They can also source and plant hedges and bushes that perfectly complement your business.

■ **Planted Areas, Shrubs, and Bedding:** The skilled maintenance team can create stunning planted areas or maintain existing ones through pruning, trimming, and plant care. They can also provide seasonal hanging baskets, tubs or boxes.

As every property is unique, to ensure their outstanding service from the outset, Chatterley will carry out a full evaluation to make sure that their quote and pricing is fair, taking into consideration the size of the grounds, work required and offering flexible contracts which can be customised to your precise requirements, allowing you to choose the contract length that suits you, whether it's for a few months, a year, or longer.

Whatever your requirements, Chatterley will work to offer a grounds maintenance package for you. They offer hourly fees or a flat rate for regular visits making it easy to budget.

Sam said: "Choosing us means your grounds will remain in pristine condition year-round, relieving you of the burden of landscaping responsibilities."

CLEANING SERVICES

Maintaining a clean and healthy work environment is essential for employee wellbeing and productivity.

With this in mind, Chatterley are dedicated to enhancing the cleanliness, hygiene and overall appeal of office spaces, village halls and community venues.

They offer a range of services to meet the unique needs of each property, ensuring that environments are appealing, welcoming spaces as well as providing a top-tier cleaning service.

A range of cleaning services are available and can be tailored to your needs, from daily maintenance to deep cleaning. The team use eco-friendly products and state-of-the-art equipment to ensure workspaces and community centres are spotless and germ free.

They also offer an open-up or lock-up service to allow cleaning of spaces such as village halls outside of opening hours.

Whatever your requirements, Chatterley possesses the expertise and solutions to surpass your expectations.
To find out more, visit:
WWW.CHATTERLEY.LTD
You can also call:
0333 8800 778
or Whatsapp
07969 046 430

Get ready to picnic!

ALVECHURCH Picnic in the Park returns this year on Sunday 26th May in its usual spot in the Meadows, Meadow Lane, Alvechurch, *writes event committee member Sarah Courbet*.

This year will be the 12th Alvechurch Picnic in the Park. Thanks to our fabulous, involved community, the event goes from strength to strength every year – and this year promises to be no exception.

Due to the continued success of the "Fun Dog Show", this will again start at the earlier time of 10.30am so there will be more time to celebrate all the dogs in our village, with classes such as "Best Trick, Waggiest Tail and Cutest Puppy".

Local canine vet Sarah-Jane Barton is back to be our fantastic judge once more and due to our very kind sponsors, most classes have a rosette to 4th place as normal, as well as prizes.

All class winners will also go through to "Best in Show", and have the opportunity to win an additional rosette, medal and winner's trophy.

Registration for the dog show is on the day, however we remind entrants to arrive from 10am as registration closes at 10.25am.

Every year the organisers strive to keep the much-loved format of stalls, entertainers, charities, and activities but also add in new things to keep the event fresh.

Last year we had bumper cars which are coming back again; and this year we are delighted to welcome back the much-anticipated and popular pony rides. There may even be a fun balloon activity in the style of the *Crystal Maze*.

The official opening of the event at 12pm will include stars from Alvechurch Cricket Club ladies' team and this year's event logo designer, Hugo Lamb, whose drawing captured the intention of the organisers to promote more recycling during the day.

There is a very full entertainment programme, which has something for everyone and runs until 4.30pm.

Memories of 2023: Busy crowds of villagers enjoy Picnic in the Park.

The 2024 logo: Designed by Hugo Lamb, aged seven.

Firm favourites will be returning, including refreshments from eateries including The Lounge and many more. The bouncy castle will be back as well as face painting, sporting challenges, games, activities, raffles, tombolas, and lots of things to buy and collect.

Another exciting development are pre-prepared picnic boxes by Alvechurch cafe Ritual. There will be a selection of sandwiches, savoury nibbles and sweet things available – all in a box.

At the end of the event, villagers are invited to pack up and head to the neighbouring Alvechurch Cricket Club for another fun-packed evening of entertainment.

Picnic in the Park could not be held without the generosity of our sponsor stalwarts: Thomas Brothers and LogCo.co; and our ever-grateful thanks go to outgoing sponsors Oulsnams and Charles Lovell & Co who have sponsored the event year after year.

We also welcome new sponsors Alvechurch Dental, JT Electrical and Redditch Chiropractic Care. We also extend huge thanks to Alvechurch Parish Council for allowing us to use "The Meadows" and for all their ongoing support.

Due to the scale of the event, stewards are needed to help out, so if you are able to, and would like to donate just one hour of your time on the day, please email alvechurchpitp@gmail.com. You will get free refreshments including a bap and a pint!

As the picnic is held outside, things are subject to change – please check the latest news on the picnic's website: www.alvechurchpicnic.org (courtesy of 35 Creatives Limited), or the Facebook page (search "Alvechurch Parish Picnic in the Park"). You can also get in touch via email at alvechurchpitp@gmail.com.

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Parish news

Synopsis of the Chairman's Annual Report – Annual Parish Meeting – 25th March 2024

Last year, in May, we had Parish & District Council elections. It was an opportunity for our residents to make their views known through the ballot box.

Due to a shortage of candidates, the Parish Council had an 'uncontested' election with all but one of the previous Parish Councillors standing again. I'm grateful to those fellow Cllrs for their continued support and for remaining on the Council. We did have vacancies on the Council for much of the year and it was proving hard to recruit new Cllrs to join us. However, I'm pleased to say, shortly after the election several residents came forward to join the Council and, as a result, we continue to enjoy a full complement of twelve Cllrs. This has made a significant difference to the volume of work the Council can do, as much of what is done by Cllrs is now shared between a greater number of Cllrs.

At District Council level, we said our goodbyes and thanks to former District Cllrs Annette English and Kate Van der Plank and welcomed new D Cllrs Alan & Rachael Bailes to represent us for our Alvechurch South and Village Wards. Both are well known to APC, with Rachael having been and remaining Parish Councillor. We're also pleased that D Cllr Charlie Hotham was re-elected to represent our residents living in the north of our Parish. We look forward to working with all of them over the forthcoming year.

Last year I reported on the support offered by APC to help with the setting up of the Community Larder based at the Baptist Church. APC has welcomed the success of this Community initiative which is providing help to many residents and their families throughout our Parish. On behalf of my fellow Cllrs, I would like to record our sincere thanks to all those volunteers that give their time to such a worthy service. It gives me much pleasure to report that APC continues to support local groups with financial grants. Our Parish has many community groups that serve a wide range of year groups. These all help to benefit and enhance the lives of many of our residents and, as most are run by volunteers, we would again wish to thank and recognise their valuable contribution to Parish life.

As some of you may know, the Parish Council is one of the main stakeholders promoting the setting up of a 'Men's Shed' Project. Although in its infancy, early indications are that this will be well supported by a specific group of residents that haven't necessarily been well catered for within our community in the past. If you don't know what's planned, please contact the Parish Office for further details and information requesting when and where this group meets. A special thanks for the support and valuable contribution from members of 'The Lounge' to take this project forward. It's very much a 'community' effort to get it off the ground.

Last year I reported on four key subjects. It seems appropriate to provide a brief update on these. They are:

Rowney Green Pavilion & Playing Fields

I would wish to again recognise and applaud the continued investment of time being put in by local residents to improve and manage the playing fields and Pavilion in Rowney Green. It was this commitment that was fundamental in securing the agreement of APC to grant the Rowney Green Village Hall Trustees a 15-year lease of the facilities.

It's important to publicise that these facilities are still a major asset within our Parish which can be enjoyed by all residents.

Pathway Lighting Upgrade

As previously reported, APC's pathway lighting upgrade was completed; the Council also took the opportunity to install a further 5 new columns to illuminate areas where residents had suggested would benefit from improved lighting. At the same time, APC agreed a new formal maintenance contract for all its lighting columns which guarantees a swift response to repair any defective lanterns, regular nightly inspections and yearly maintenance, as well as electrical safety checks.

The additional benefit resulting from our upgrade is that the utility charges associated with our pathway lighting have noticeably been reduced. It is APC's intention to report on what these savings amount to once a full 12-month period has elapsed.

Sale of APC's Gravel Pit in Rowney Green

The proceeds of the sale of the Gravel Pit remain earmarked for new or additional allotments. APC has actively been seeking possible opportunities to provide a long-term site for our allotments, but for a variety of reasons, it has proved difficult to secure or advance those that have been identified. I would take this opportunity to ask residents to contact APC with any suggestions for suitable sites and opportunities which may be worth exploring.

Parish Council's Finances

The Council's finances remain healthy due to good governance, shrewd and planned budgeting. This being the case, it has allowed the Council to identify and plan for new projects to benefit all residents. Our published Strategic Plan provides more detail, but the Council remains flexible to adapt its plans and intentions should circumstances require it to do so or to take advantage of Local or Central Government grants.

I also wish to provide commentary on two further subjects. These are:

Provision of a Permanent Home for a Post Office Service

The Parish Council consulted residents on their views regarding the need for a permanent home for a Post Office service within the Village. This was prompted because an opportunity arose for APC to take on a lease for premises within the village which could have been for a multitude of uses, including a permanent home for a Post Office. Various stakeholders were identified and their support was secured, including a significant financial contribution from the County Council obtained through our County Councillor, Aled Luckman. Discussions and negotiations with the Post Office were also positive. However, taking on a ten-year lease of premises, at commercial rates, would have been a major undertaking and commitment by the Council which would have carried a significant risk.

Although the revenue generated by the Post Office, with other associated services linked to parcel collections and banking, was likely to cover a substantial amount of the ongoing fixed costs and wages, there was still a financial shortfall that would have had to have been covered by APC. This shortfall would have had to have been met through using the Council's reserves or through increases in the precept to residents.

After much consideration and debate by Parish Councillors, it was decided that the financial risk was not one that could be supported at this time, would leave a legacy which may restrict the direction future Cllrs may wish to take for APC and, finally, in doing so could well prejudice future plans the Council, and new Cllrs, may wish to embark on. Nevertheless, APC remains committed and is working hard to be instrumental in securing a permanent home for a Post Office again in the village. All stakeholders have confirmed their continued interest in helping to achieve this too. Various alternative opportunities have been explored since the original one, but these too have been dismissed for various and valid reasons. More recently, a good opportunity was offered to APC for the location of a Post Office within the village. Following discussions, matters had advanced to a point where a clear understanding and agreement had been reached. Unfortunately, APC has now been informed the offer has had to be withdrawn due to circumstances beyond the control of the Council.

Local Council Gold Quality Status

As most residents will know, APC achieved a national peer reviewed accreditation of Quality Gold Status in November last year. It is an endorsement that the Council demonstrates good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement. Nationally, there are only 52 Councils, including APC now, that have been awarded 'gold' status out of approximately 10,000 Parish and Town Councils throughout the UK, and only the second Council in Worcestershire to have achieved this award.

Community Initiatives

As reported last year, Parish Councillors and its Officers are continually and actively involved in numerous and varied issues.

Some of these relate to various drainage issues in our Parish, the upkeep of our main two assets; Hopwood Community Centre, The Wiggin and its playing field. It has also made representations regarding numerous planning applications and resulting decisions. In addition, the Council keeps promoting the need for improvements to our railway station car park with all stakeholders, but in particular the County Council and Network Rail, as well as campaigning hard for speed reductions on roads throughout our Parish, but mainly in the village centre, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green and Weatheroak.

APC is in the process of setting up a Community Speedwatch Group. It's a lengthy Police process, but good progress is being made.

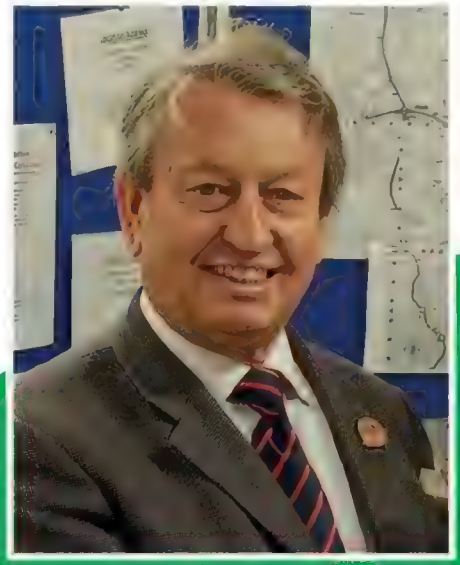
The Council's 'Emergency Plan' is now available and shared with Bromsgrove District Council. A dedicated secure store was built at Hopwood Community Centre to house temporary bedding, blankets and such other items that would be needed should our Parish ever have to confront an emergency situation and some of our residents find themselves in need last minute accommodation. Let's hope it never has to, but if it does, APC is prepared!

The Parish Council was grateful again for all the compliments received from residents regarding the flowering planter displays in the village and precinct over the summer. The Council's Caretaker is responsible for creating and maintaining these. We're very grateful for all the hard work he puts in to make these a focal point in the centre of the village.

The Parish Council remains committed to act in the best interests of all residents. We genuinely wish to receive comments, opinions and requests from residents. I wish to remind all our residents that you are very welcome to attend our meetings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Parish Councillors for their continued hard work and time, freely given, to our Council and Parish, as well as to our three District Councillors and our County Councillor too for their hard work and continual support on a range of issues over the past year. It is very much appreciated.
I also wish to thank our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Jayne Smailes, Assistant Clerk, Fay Murphy and our Caretaker, Matthew Evans, for their dedication, commitment and significant contribution to our Council. Their services are often taken for granted and sometimes go unnoticed, but are fundamental to the smooth and efficient running of the Council.

It is, and remains, an honour and privilege to serve our community in some small way.



Cllr Marc Worrall – Chairman
Alvechurch Parish Council

Unsung Hero Awards presented at the April full council meeting to:

Caren Battle
Alvechurch Library

Sarah Palmer
Alvechurch Library

Elwyn Williams
Community Litter Picking Service

Adrian Smith
On behalf of the PROW services he and his team provide

Michael Davenport
Community Service in relation to St Laurence and the Larder

YE Bank Reconciliation (Unaudited)

Bank Reconciliation at 31/03/2024

	Cash in hand 01/04/2023		141,906.15
	ADD		
	Receipts		
	01/04/2023 - 31/03/2024		367,888.14
			509,794.29
	SUBTRACT		
	Payments		
	01/04/2023 - 31/03/2024		250,482.16
A	**Cash in hand 31/03/2024**		
	(per cash book)		**259,312.13**
	Cash in hand per Bank Statement		
	Petty Cash	100.00	
	Lloyds Current Account	143,344.64	
	Lloyds Deposit Account	122,664.90	
			266,109.54
	Less unpresented payments		6,797.41
B	**Bank Balance**		**259,312.13**

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Keith Wiseman
Marc Worrall
Brett Shepherd
Nigel Cuttress

Hopwood

Paul Edwards
Samantha Lewis

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Rachael Bailes
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Have your say

We're keen to receive your comments or queries; do please contact the Parish Office if you wish to discuss any matter.

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Jayne Smailes
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Fay Murphy
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What's on the ecliptic?

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

Spot the signs of the zodiac: The constellations of the zodiac sit along the 'ecliptic' – the line the sun draws through the sky.
Images courtesy of NASA.

MAY, the merry month which sees sunset happening around nine pm and with the ecliptic being at a more oblique angle, it's getting on for 10pm before it is dark enough to see anything in our night sky.

Jupiter is disappearing behind the Sun which means there are absolutely no planets in our evening skies. Not even the far distant ones like Uranus and Neptune.

"What's the ecliptic?" I hear you ask. . . Well, it is simply the line the Sun draws through our sky as we travel round it during the course of the year.

So it starts in the sunset, just north of west at the moment and curves across the sky ending in the south east.

The constellations that lie on it are all the signs of the zodiac, well-known to followers of astrology.

With the Sun in Aries at the start of the month, a portion of Taurus can be seen over in the west, as soon as the sky is dark but the first really visible constellation is Gemini.

The heads of the Twins are easy to spot above Procyon and they are every schoolboy's favourite, Castor and Pollux. You can see their bodies as lines of stars streaming out below and to the right.

Moving left, the next discernible constellation is Leo. Very big and very obvious, Leo really looks the part with his head adorned with a mane and his sturdy legs keeping him in that proud stance (or am I getting a little carried away?).

The brightest star in Leo is Regulus which is very easy to spot and his head is formed by the reversed question mark of stars above it which ends with the little star of Algenubi.

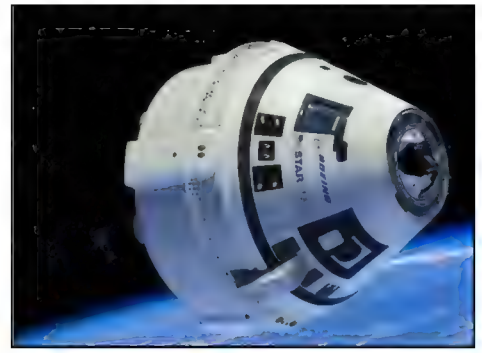
Leo's tail is marked by Denebola with Zosma just above it.

Now, you may have noticed we seemed to have skipped over the constellation of Cancer, the Crab.

We have, literally done just that because it sits midway between Gemini and Leo but it has no really bright stars. In a really dark spot with your eyes dark-adapted you can just glimpse a crooked line of stars at this position but that is about all. Poor old Cancer.

Moving left from Leo we can see Virgo with its brightest star, Spica very noticeable towards the south east. Don't confuse it with the even brighter Arcturus high above it, said to represent the Greek goddess Dike, a few of the stars comprising her torso are easily spotted, especially Porrima and Vindemiatrix.

The ecliptic now disappears into Libra which sits on the horizon in the early evening. We have a minor meteor shower during May: the Eta Aquariids, so keep an eye on the sky if you're out and about late at night (but try not to fall over).



Among the stars: Boeing's Starliner craft is set to launch in May.

There should be an exciting launch during May. This is the first crewed flight of Boeing's Starliner craft which has been much anticipated, being around seven years late.

If it happens (fingers crossed emoji) it should dock with the ISS so we might be able to see it from Alvechurch.

As ever, we must turn to that space oracle, heavens-above.com for guidance.

And don't forget Star Wars Day on the 4th.

Open day on the waters

BUILDING on the success of last year's "Open Day" around the Bittell Estate, Barnt Green Waters are pleased to announce the Estate is holding another Event on Saturday the 11th May, with the opportunity to experience sailing, subject to weather conditions, and walking the Estate which is all within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Barnt Green Waters Ltd is a publicly-registered non-profit making company whose sole function is to manage and maintain the Bittell Reservoirs Estate. It was formed in 1920 following the purchase of sections of land and the two small Arrow Pools from the Earl of Plymouth for £5,000 and was given the "Sporting Rights" in perpetuity.

The bulk of the area is occupied by three reservoirs, Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub, which feed both the Worcester & Birmingham Canal and the River Arrow. The estate includes a diversity of habitats, thus is designated as a SSSI.

The estate is home to a fishing club and a sailing club and is also used for a variety of other outdoor activities. The company, together with the two clubs, funded the building of a clubhouse overlooking Upper Bittell, which houses a large meeting room, changing facilities, a kitchen and bar – and also The Boathouse Venue.

The fishing club was established in 1888 and provides a wide range of fishing opportunities in an attractive and peaceful environment covering five stretches of water. Three of these, Lower Bittell, Mill Shrub and Upper Arrow are reserved for fly fishing and are stocked with trout. All three provide bank fishing and there are also boats on the two larger trout pools. The

largest reservoir on the estate (Upper Bittell, 80 acres) is a coarse fishery with a large head of bream, roach and perch and provides excellent pike fishing in the autumn and winter months. The final pool, Lower Arrow, contains tench and carp, as well as bream, roach and perch.

Full members can fish in all five pools, while a separate annual membership is available for those who only wish to coarse fish. There are no day tickets available to the public, but members may invite guests to fish on payment of a small fee.

The sailing club (Est. 1918) is one of the premier sailing clubs in the West Midlands and membership is open to all categories. We are also an RYA Teaching Establishment, providing Junior Training courses from the age of seven, together with adult courses.

We feel sure that whether you are an experienced sailor, or a newcomer to the sport, you will gain a great deal should you decide to join us. Much of our activity is centred on racing but we also encourage informal sailing outside the racing programme.

You are not limited to just dinghy sailing at the club, as we also have a sailboarding section, an expanding paddleboarding group and a small team of canoeists and kayakers.

The Birmingham, Running & Triathlon Club (BRATS) organises open water swimming at Upper Bittell for their members from May to September, to help them train for competitive swimming events.

Anyone interested in natural history and the countryside can join our Friends of Bittell section which gives access to the estate. The reservoirs are home to a range of wading birds and a stopping off point for many species of migrants, and this section includes the well-established Birdwatchers.

Within the estate, The Boathouse Venue – in the clubhouse – provides panoramic views across the tranquil 80 acres of Upper Bittell reservoir and offers a secluded venue to companies and voluntary organisations during the week for in-house training sessions, sales meetings and seminar facilities or, as a regular meeting point for a club or society.

At the weekend, The Boathouse Venue becomes an ideal location for wedding receptions, special anniversary or birthday lunches, evening events, or just family get-togethers.

There is the option of erecting a marquee or covered extension on the side of the building, to provide a reception area, or in the summer month some additional shade, if the weather proves too warm.

The club's preferred catering company can offer a range of tasty culinary delights, from luxury finger buffets, to BBQs or fine dining experiences. The Club's own catering facilities, which hold a 5* hygiene rating, are also available for external catering companies to use.

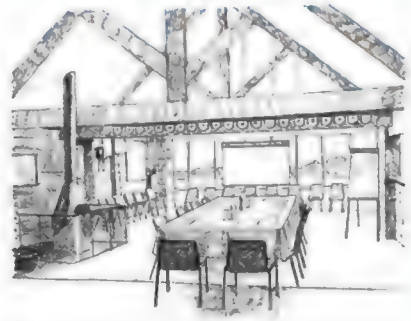
There is a fully stocked and licenced bar which can be tailored to suit your needs, with additional or alternative refreshments.

To find out more about these facilities, please contact: boathouse.bgw.gmail.com

Come and Meet Us

We would be pleased to welcome you to Upper Bittell on Saturday the 11th May, between 11am and 4pm, to meet up with the various sporting sections and activities, obtain the information you need first hand and the relevant direct points of contact to hopefully join us and take part in one or more of the above membership activities. For location use the postcode B45 8BH.

The "BOATHOUSE VENUE"
with stunning panoramic views across Upper Bittell is available for hire.



An ideal location for: -

- Wedding receptions, special anniversary, birthday lunch, or evening event.
- Company training or sales meeting, or regular meeting for a Club or Society.
  - 5* hygiene rating of kitchen facilities.
  - Introduction to preferred caterer option
  - Licensed bar

Please email your enquiry to;
boathouse.bgw@gmail.com

Another win for The Weighbridge

FOR the second time since Chris Lamb took over as landlord of The Weighbridge, Alvechurch, just three years ago, the pub has once again been awarded CAMRA Redditch and Bromsgrove Pub of the Year.

Members of CAMRA and villagers gathered at The Weighbridge for the presentation of the award and to celebrate, which included morris dancing and some excellent real ale.

Paul Richards, Bromsgrove and Redditch CAMRA branch chairman, presented Chris with the award (above), and acknowledged The Weighbridge for the high quality beer, great atmosphere, and its support of community groups.

Chris thanked his family, and the pub team and CAMRA for all of their ongoing support and said: "I thought last year was a fluke!

"Then it was really reassuring to hear that people still wanted to keep coming here and still thought we were doing a good job. . . so we must be doing something right! I love this place, I really do."

The Weighbridge now goes on to the next regional CAMRA round, where they will be up against some fierce competition.

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Meet the Team

When you become a client at PPM Financial Planning you do not just acquire an adviser, but a team of professionals who all know your story and have their own integral part to play in bringing it to life

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Out with hand sanitiser

The Office for National Statistics has been sorting through its inflation shopping basket, **Martin Pryor** talks us through what this means for you.

EVERY year in March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) announces the results of a review of the approximately 750 items which it uses to compute inflation indices, such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The annual review is a reminder that the calculation of inflation is not a simple exercise: our spending habits – what we buy and stop buying – evolve alongside changing prices.

It is always interesting to see what items have been introduced to the basket and which items have been removed, reflecting consumer spending and social trends.

Inflation has, of course, been a hot topic for some time due to its recent alarming spike. The UK Inflation Rate is at 3.40%, compared to 4.00% last month and 10.40% last year. This is higher than the long-term average of 2.83%.

The 2024 revision saw 16 items added to the shopping basket and 15 ejected. Among the more interesting changes were:

WHAT'S IN

- Gluten-free bread has been added "to reflect the increasing shelf space and range of gluten free products".
- Air fryer prices are now being collected. The ONS says that spending on cooking items rose by more than 30% between 2021 and 2022.
- Sunflower and pumpkin seeds make an entrance because of their "growing popularity".
- Vinyl records have returned to the shopping basket after an absence of more than 30 years.

WHAT'S OUT

- Hand sanitiser gel, a product that was hard to avoid in 2020 because of COVID, has been dropped.
- Draught stout has been rationalised away, in part because its price movements are "very similar" to draught bitter.
- Sofa beds have left the basket because of "a drop in popularity, with pull out beds possibly becoming more widespread".
- Hot rotisserie cooked whole chicken has gone as supermarkets shift to selling smaller portions "to satisfy the lunchtime market".

For a full list of basket movers and what makes up the overall inflation basket, visit the Office for National Statistic (ONS) : www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices.

As well as shuffling the basket's contents, the ONS has also changed the weights given to each of its 12 divisions of goods and/or services, based on average expenditure in 2023.

This explains why inflation numbers might differ from your own experience, because your spending patterns might not match ONS weightings. For example, the largest single category, accounting for 14.5% of the CPI, is restaurants and hotels, closely followed at 14.3% by recreation and culture. Food comes in fifth position at 11.3%.

While inflation is expected to continue to fall this year, it will remain a fact of life and one that needs to be factored into any financial planning.

At PPM Financial Planning, when constructing a financial plan using cash flow modelling software we have continued to plan using an inflation rate of 2.5% which is slightly below the long term average.

This is because, despite the noise, we know that high spikes in a developed economy's inflation rate are short-lived.

When planning for the long term it is of course important to recognise the ravages of inflation but also to be realistic.

Everyone's exposure to inflation varies and people's reactions to paying "over the odds" for goods varies. We are surprised root vegetable seeds have not entered the basket as we know plenty of people who have resorted to "grow their own" as a protest against supermarket prices.

When creating a financial plan it is important to retain real value of the money you have accumulated by investing in asset classes that perform above inflation rates.

It is rare for interest rates in the bank to achieve this which is why only short-term money needs and "sleep at night" money should be kept on deposit.

The two asset classes long term that consistently outperform inflation are equities (world stock markets) and property.

We help clients find that balance and diversification to create a credible short-term and long-term financial plan, always mindful of life's biggest risk – not volatility, but inflation.

If you would like to protect your long-term money against inflation, then give us a call and arrange a no-obligation meeting to discuss your financial plan.

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner
For more information, please contact us
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martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com
www.ppmfinancialplanning.com

The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate Tax Planning This article should not be regarded as personal advice. You should seek independent financial advice to apply these theories to your circumstances.

Should I stay or should I go?

Mark Meads tells us how **Village Financial** can help make getting a mortgage easier for you.

AT last the housing market is starting to pick up for the Spring.

We are getting a number of clients enquiring about how much they are able to afford on a mortgage, before making the decision to put their own property on the market.

This vital conversation allows clients to make an informed decision, on not only potentially moving home, but also looking at alternatively borrowing to improve their current home and staying put.

At Village Financial we can support you in all your mortgage needs and we are able to advise on mortgages for all adults of any age and circumstance.

We can also arrange new and review your existing life and critical illness policies to ensure you are getting the best value cover for your current circumstances.

We understand that moving or improving your home can be an emotional rollercoaster so our promise to you is that we'll make the process easier, we'll liaise with your estate agents and lawyers as needed, we'll keep you updated as your mortgage progresses, we'll help you every step of the way.

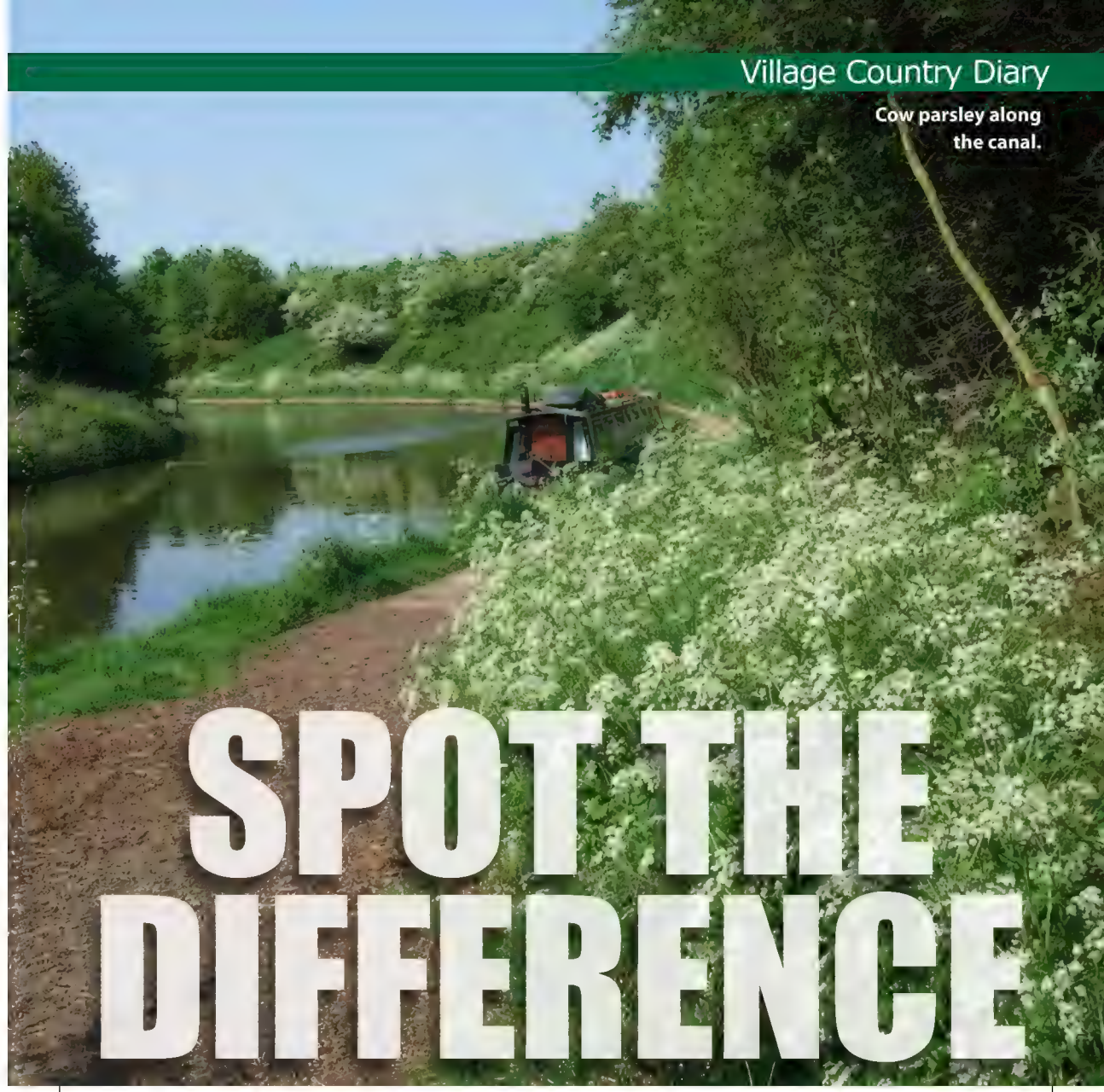
And rest assured once you become a client of ours we'll be there every time your existing deal matures.

We'll contact you well in advance and ensure you get the right deal for your circumstances, at that point in your life.

Mark Meads (above), and his team promise to make the process of buying property easier for you.

If you would like an initial discussion to see how we can help, please contact us on 07730 011 897 or through our website: www.villagefinancial.co.uk

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage



Cow parsley along the canal.

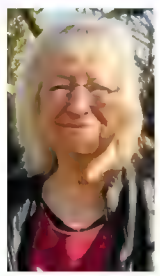
SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

ALTHOUGH we had a mild winter and spring, there was a lack of sun and much more rain than average. The pattern of flowering in plants and appearance of insects and birds has been variable.

I saw a brimstone butterfly emerge really early on 15 February (a warm sunny day) and didn't see another till 19 March, and I still haven't seen orange tip butterflies (although one is on the cover of this magazine).

Something I have really enjoyed is watching the vegetation alongside the canal. Usually it is given a full cut in winter, but it wasn't this year.

I've seen all the plants set and scatter seed and die back into their roots naturally, and the new growth come though. I am expecting this to lead to greater biodiversity through the coming summer.



Mary Green looks at another family of flowers this month – the 'umbellifers' – see if you can tell them apart.

This month I will look at another flower family, which shows the way plants grow in sequence through the year. They are quite easily recognisable as a group but hard to tell apart from each other! Because

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of this, they are a good example of how to look at and know plants and animals.

You can't really identify these flowers by looking them up on an app or a book, but if you get to know their habits you can know which is which.

This matters, as some are edible and some deadly poisonous. You should never pick and eat any of them without expert help, even if you think you recognise them. This applies to all wild plants and fungi – don't pick and eat without full knowledge.

They used to be called the Umbelliferae family but these days are called the carrot family or Apiaceae. I still call them umbellifers because the flower heads (umbels) look like umbrellas.

Each umbel is made up of many little florets, so they're very different from the rose family I wrote about last month.

There are over 50 named UK varieties in this family, though fewer grow round here. I wrote about some of them in *The Village* 13 years ago, when I called them "The Good the Bad and the Ugly"!

The one we all know, which you have been seeing everywhere for the last couple of weeks, is **Cow Parsley**. Its white frothy flowers grow all along our lanes, roads and towpaths unless cut down. The ferny leaves have been there for months, all winter if it is mild.

It grows particularly on the edges of woodland and by hedges, because it flowers early enough to catch the light before the tree leaves cut the sunshine out. It's the first umbellifer to flower en masse, so you can't easily miss it.

At one time it was given the posh name Queen Anne's Lace because it was thought too beautiful for a name like cow parsley.

You may have seen another umbellifer flower before this, even occasionally in winter, though it has its main flowering in summer. This is **Hogweed**. It has very different leaves – coarsely segmented and large, as opposed to the fine-cut ferny leaves of cow parsley.

Its flowers are much larger and flatter, and it grows very tall in summer, sometimes above human height (though it's not to be confused with giant hogweed, not a native plant).

Hogweed: Large, flat flowers bloom in summer.

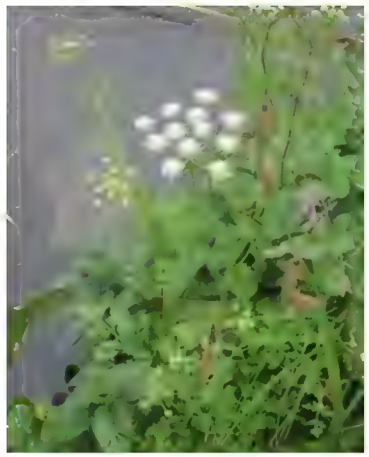
Pignut: You might spot in May.

It's an incredibly tough plant, growing almost anywhere, and a great nectar food for insects and seed source for birds.

About the time you read this another umbellifer starts flowering, one of my favourites – **Pignut**. This is rarer now because it grows on old undisturbed pasture. It looks like a short cow parsley – I spent years thinking it was – but has distinctive very fine delicate feathery leaves.

It survives in churchyards, where it is often mown down, in a few "unimproved" pastures and meadows and in the Wiggins meadows in Alvechurch.

Underground it has a swollen root, the "nut," which is edible and tasty and used to be enjoyed by people as well as pigs. It is the special food plants of the chimney-sweeper moth, a lovely little black moth now as rare as the plant or the meadows.



Above: Hemlock water dropwort.

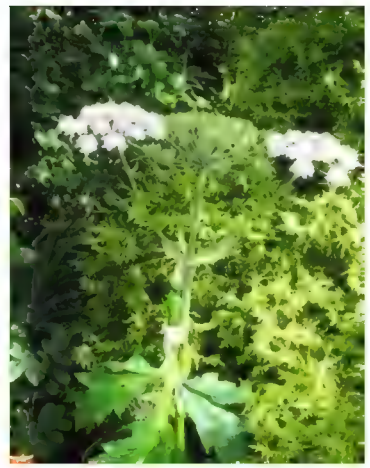
These three are edible. Pignut roots, cow parsley leaves and the seeds of hogweed (which make a lovely spice) were food for centuries. However, people are often told not to eat them because they can be confused with other plants in the same family which can kill you.

One of these grows freely by the canal here. Its leaves have been visible through April and it starts flowering usually in May. It's **Hemlock Water Dropwort**.

The leaves are bright green and look a bit like celery leaves. It grows right by the water or even slightly in it, which helps identity it. The stalks, leaves and flowers are less delicate than cow parsley but not as coarse

A plant with a strong creeping habit: Ground elder.

Wild carrot: Normally found by the coast.



Growing tall: Giant Hogweed.

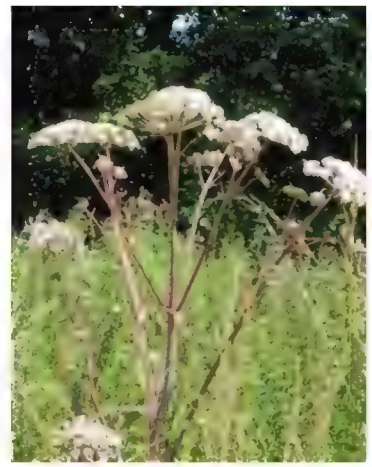
as hogweed. Like all umbellifers it is a great source of nectar for insects, but we should leave it alone. Many common British plants are poisonous.

Hemlock itself grows occasionally here too, though more likely on disturbed ground than among permanent vegetation, and often in wet ground.

It flowers in late spring and looks similar to cow parsley, unfortunately! However, it has an unpleasant smell and the stems are clearly reddish-spotted. Leave it alone: it, too, can be fatal.

Once the cow parsley is over in June, a flower called **Chervil** comes in similar places. It looks almost the same, perhaps flatter and whiter and a little less frothy, and for ages I just thought cow parsley had a long season.

You have to really know the details of seed shapes and leaves to tell them apart, but you can spot them from their different flowering times which mean they don't compete for insects.



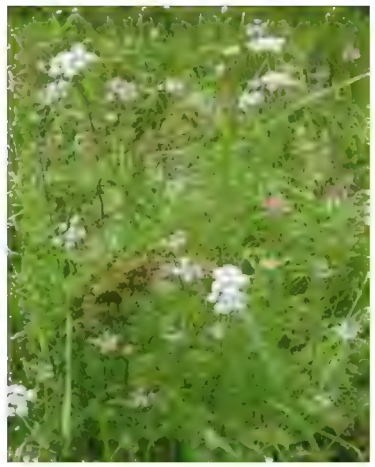
Angelica: Slightly purple plants.

Another June-flowering umbellifer is **Ground Elder**. Most gardeners don't like this as it has strong roots and a creeping habit, spreading to cover the ground.

It used to be called goutweed and used to treat gout. It's highly edible when young, and I use the leaves in salads. The flowers are very attractive and it looks great with roses.

The leaves resemble elder tree leaves – leaflets either side of a stalk – and it flowers about the same time as elder, but it's no relation.

Wild Carrot starts flowering in June and carries on through the summer. It's normally coastal but spreads inland and is quite common here



Fine and delicate: Hedge parsley.

A yellow umbel: Pepper saxifrage.

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especially near the station. It's biennial and seeds well on broken ground, so may come up in your garden.

It's an attractive plant with feathery leaves and unmistakeable flowers if you watch them for long enough – they start concave like saucers, become convex like umbrellas and end up concave.

It has an edible root but it's too thin to bother with, and of course was bred to become our carrot vegetable.

In July comes **Hedge Parsley**. This is less common but grows round here in drier hedge banks and field edges. It's an annual so needs to seed where there isn't too much permanent vegetation.

It's a bit like cow parsley but much finer and more delicate, not so tall, with a pink tinge to the flowers.

About the same time, **Wild Angelica** starts and may last till September. This grows on damp ground and loves the canalside. It's really big and fleshy, a bit like hogweed, but slightly purplish all over including the flowers. The stems smell and taste lovely – like the candied angelica we used to have – and it's very attractive to insects.

Among the other less well known umbellifers I should mention **Alexanders**, a seaside plant growing profusely on cliffs all round England.

For some reason there has always been a big patch near the Callow Hill Road bridge over the canal, which has spread to a few other places. It's another big fleshy one with huge heads of flowers.

They are quite yellow so it's easy to spot. It was used as a food plant in the past.

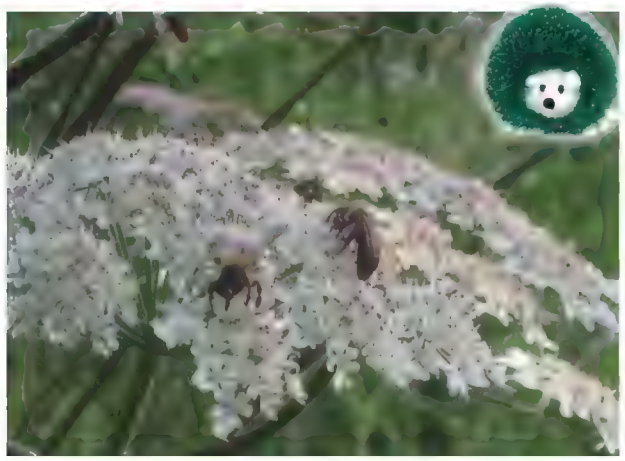
Others that you might occasionally see are fool's parsley (a poisonous annual), pepper saxifrage (a yellow umbel found in old meadow and pasture), burnet saxifrage and wild parsnip (seen occasionally round here), sweet cicely (in northern England), and sea holly and samphire on the sea shore.

There are lots of culinary herbs in this family though most of them not native here: they include fennel, caraway, coriander and of course parsley.

This run through the umbels shows how a family of plants lives in sequence so each one is in the right place at the right time to host its insects.

I know that plants communicate with each other underground through their roots and their accompanying fungi, so I like to think of them telling each other "Your turn now!"

■ **I often mention plants that grow in the churchyard, and a few years ago I wrote this poem after a wildlife walk in St Laurence churchyard, Alvechurch. We talked about the interconnectedness of all life.**



Clockwise from above: Bees on hogweed, Hemlock stalk, Chimney sweeper moth.

Roots

I'm in the graveyard, looking at the trees
Showing people what's around them every day
Imagining with them the roots under our feet
Reaching, twining, nurturing, taking.
We talk about the mysteries of old turf
Carrying ancient history of fungi and plants.
One says, What about the bodies down there?
I say they make a part of the embrace –
Animal remains are vital to the soil.
A few wince. They've been told we're different
Not part of the flux and rhythm of the earth
We are separate, its custodians, we care for it.
We aren't. We don't. But if we know we are
Full of fungi and bacteria, not alone
But linked into the roots and leaves and stars
We can be more human. I want my flesh
To give and take from fungi, roots and worms.
If I know I am part of this wide web of life
I see too I'm entwined in people's lives
Bound to them, living and dying with them
Not a solitary modern human, obsessed
With identity and my selfish happiness.

The anonymous birder — *How to enjoy village birdlife*

What wonderful warblers

BLACKCAP, chiff chaff and willow warbler . . . by May there will be more than five million of these blue-tit size birds in the UK and all present in our area, particularly the first two.

They will come in early spring and be gone by the end of October but for a common breeding bird, many will not have seen one or even be aware they are here.

They are members of a group of birds known as warblers; small, singing birds often migratory, ie: they fly here to breed as long warm days and a ready supply of insect food is available.

They then return along with their young to their wintering grounds . . . how nice to be able to give our grim British winters a miss!

Small and slight, all three together would weigh about the equivalent of three pound coins and not easy to see by the time the trees are in full leaf.

Of course, the way to get round this is by recognising their distinctive songs. There are some good apps, or YouTube clips to help if you can't make a *Village* bird walk.

The blackcap, known as the Northern Nightingale (latitude wise), has a complex, distinctive song, a mixture of notes and phrases, a true warbler worthy of it's name.

Listen out for it in scrub, woodland edges and anywhere with a dense understorey where it likes to nest. It will sing from tree tops and bushes, fairly easy to spot but also wary if disturbed.

The chiff chaff is often the first migratory bird to be heard, usually arriving on a southerly wind with a bit of sunshine in the latter half of march.

It announces itself by singing it's name, repeatedly, and its song is unmissable once you know it. Like the blackcap, it is very common in our area and prefers a similar habitat too, also nesting lower down but singing

Above: Willow warbler in branches.
Right: A chiff chaff sings.

conspicuously in the tree tops. The willow warbler's song has a lovely plaintive, descending scale. It is the most subtle of the three but very rewarding when you can pick it out. Certainly one of my favourites. Again a bird of coppice and wood which nests on the ground.

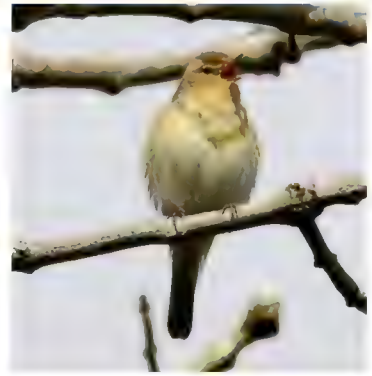
Although once common in the Midlands, it is progressively moving West and North to breed. I heard them in numbers locally during early April, but they were probably just moving through.

If you do encounter these birds, consider that they will have travelled from as far as Northern Africa, Southern Europe or in the case of the willow warbler, south of the Sahara in order to get here.

The willow warbler is the slightly brighter twin of the chiff chaff. Often the only way bird-ringers tell them apart is by the slightly longer wing of the willow warbler, as they have the longer journey.

They migrate overnight and eventually arrive at the same breeding ground, providing conditions allow, as the previous year.

The fledglings will have to do this journey a few months after hatching,



all the sat-nav built into their genetics.

Some black caps and chiff chaffs are increasingly overwintering in the British Isles. . . another sign of our changing climate.

They are all insectivorous feeders but the blackcap will eat berries and seeds in the autumn after breeding.

It can also be seen on birdfeeders at this time and sometimes in the winter. It is easily recognised with it's grey plumage and blackcap, unless it is a female, which has a brown cap.

So, when you are out and about this spring listen out for something different – become a birding sleuth and see if you can detect one of our natural miracles, often hidden but all around.

JL

Village Gardening

Thought about trying 'no-mow'?

This month, **Leighanne Gee** gives us some jobs to be getting on with as we head into the warmer months, and what you can plant in whatever garden space you have, ready for summer.

AFTER a wet and stormy April, it's easy to think that we're back in autumn not spring!

The cool, gusty winds littered gardens with fallen twigs and branches, providing you with a great resource to create a small habitat for wildlife.

Simply pick a quiet spot in your garden and make a pile that sits on top of the soil; you can make it as big or as small as you'd like. It's an easy way to support beetles, frogs and more, plus it'll save some space in the brown bin for the grass clippings and weeds.

You can support your local wildlife in other ways, like leaving the lawn to grow – now hear me out. . . the thought of floppy long grass may make you feel uncomfortable, especially if you love the crisp finish of a well-maintained lawn.

However, insect populations have taken a hammering over the past few decades and long grass is an invaluable habitat that's hard to find these days.

You may have heard of "No-Mow May", it's a nationwide movement that encourages people to wait until June 1st to cut their lawns.

In an ideal world, the whole lawn would be left, with maybe just a mown path running through it, but if that feels too extreme, why not try leaving a patch (or two) instead? It all helps!

The recent rain has certainly encouraged the plants to grow rapidly, including the weeds! Now's the time to get on top of them, before you end up with rosebay willow herb or nettles swamping your borders.

Make sure to remove the roots, and ideally, spread a couple of inches of compost around your plants afterwards.

Mulching the borders has multiple benefits; it smothers the weed seed and prevents it from germinating, it nourishes the soil as the compost (or manure) breaks down and by covering the soil surface, it helps to keep the soil moist.

The most common weeds that I've seen lately (aside from nettles and brambles) are wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), they have yellowy orange flowers in summer followed by heads of hooked seeds which get caught in clothing and animal fur – helping them to spread widely.

I have also seen Rosebay willow herb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) which has pink flowers that are very popular with pollinators and again, very good at self seeding.

'No-mow': A village lawn left to grow wild, with mown paths running through.

The trickiest to remove has got to be ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria*). Their white roots spread under the soil, and like bindweed, are brittle and break when you pull them, leaving small pieces that quickly come back. If you have it, try to be thorough and patient – they will most likely return, so remember to check back regularly to fully remove it.

But it's not just the weeds that are shooting up to the sky; Clematis and Lonicera (honeysuckle) will be throwing out tendrils and winding stems to follow the sun, you may want to tie them to a trellis or support to stop them becoming unruly.

Wisteria buds are plump and ready to dazzle with a showy display of flowers. They're not around for long but just like cherry blossom, they're worth waiting for.

The same can be said for peonies, whether you have the regal P. "Duchesse de Namours" with creamy, white double blooms, or P. "Bowl of Beauty" with pink, open flowers. They're a firm favourite with bees often being found rolling around in the pollen.

A mix of clematis: Clematis and other climbing plants start to shoot upwards this month.

They may be a bit more pricey than other herbaceous perennials but personally, I'd say that they're worth the investment, especially as they make such a good cut flower.

Keep them at their best by mulching around the base with compost or leaf mould and use a strong metal support to prevent damage from severe wind or rain.

And if you'd like to develop your own cut flower patch, there's plenty of beginner-friendly plants to try.

Choose a sunny spot and look for cosmos, multi-headed sunflowers and dahlias at the garden centre.

Keep them well watered in hot weather and you'll rewarded with an array of bright blooms – just remember to keep to picking them to encourage further flowering.

Ammi is another great choice that can be sown from seed in May, with frothy white flower heads, they're very popular in arrangements.

Keep your strawberry plants compact and productive by removing runners; the long, thin stems that develop into new plants. This will help encouraging better fruiting.

It may be time to earth up the potatoes, sow salad leaves, tie in tomatoes and pot on chilli plants, sow your veggies: babycorn instead of sweetcorn instead of letting squirrels getting them, cucumbers and carrots are good for children, kale in modules or pots.

If you don't have a kitchen garden, veg beds or an allotment at your disposal – make use of those pots, sunny windowsills and conservatories!

Try swapping the pre-packaged herbs (often found lurking at the back of the fridge) for pots of fresh basil, mint or coriander. Or maybe a chilli plant, and thanks to mail order, there's plenty of heat options; mild, green, cooking Padrón peppers from Spain to the spicy, red Bird Eye chillies popular in Thai cuisine.

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EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA PRESENTS A "FAMILY CONCERT" on Saturday 11th May at 3pm in St Laurence Church. This is a fun-filled afternoon for the whole family that will include the story of Alice in Wonderland to music. Tickets: £8 adults £3 students & under 16s under 5 free FROM: The Lounge & Gin & Pickles Alvechurch, also by BACS on www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk
On Saturday 29th June celebrated guitarist CRAIG OGDEN will join TMS for a concert including Vivaldi's 'Concerto in D' and Boccherini's 'Fanfango'. LOVE AND ROMANCE' will be at St Laurence Church, Alvechurch at 7.30pm (doors & bar open at 7pm). Tickets: £15, £3 students & over 5s from The Lounge & Gin & Pickles Alvechurch also by BACS on www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk £17.50 & £3 on the door (cash or card) subject to availability. This concert is part of Bromsgrove Festival www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Summer Concert on Sunday evening, 30th June 2024, (time tbc), in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B458NR. "A night at the Opera", has a varied programme including: Holst - Ballet Music from 'The Perfect Fool', Tchaikovsky - Rose Adagio from 'The Sleeping Beauty', Puccini - Manon Lescaut Intermezzo, Delibes - Sylvia Suite, together with music by Wagner, Hérold, Wolf-Ferrari, Lysenko and Reinecke. Admission is free, and donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated. You are invited to come along to support the orchestra and bring friends.
Save the Date of our Autumn Concert, which will be on 24th November 2024 in the same venue.

MUNTJACS CAFE BLACKWELL is now open at Blackwell Community Hall on Saturdays between 10am and 2pm offering freshly ground coffee, homemade cakes, other refreshments and a very warm welcome from volunteer organisers.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. New members are always welcome. For more information or to join or book them, see their website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk.
There are two bank holidays in May but they are meeting on 13 and 21 May, and performing at St Richards festival in Droitwich on 5 May and the Picnic in the Park on 26 May – go and talk to them!

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm. For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646. The programme is subject to change if the circumstances dictate.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, rehearse at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical mu sic along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

CALLING ALL SLEUTHS!

THE Rowney Green Players are proud to present their latest production: A Butler Did It! This hilarious whodunit promises an evening of mystery, suspense, and laughter that will keep you guessing until the very end.

Join the cast at Rowney Green Village Hall for a thrilling ride as they unravel the clues. Performances run from Thursday 16 May until Saturday 18 May at 7:30pm.

Tickets are available by messaging or calling 07977 254 519. You can also find tickets at www.eventbrite.com and search "Rowney Green Players present: A Butler Did It!"

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. They meet on Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at The Orchards School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided at the centre. For info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least 3 concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition! For more information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

DANCING

JAZZ HEELS CLASS FOR ADULTS. A new class held on Tuesdays 5:45-6:30pm at Hopwood Village Hall. For more info contact Amy on 07979408997

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL AGM

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL committee invites anyone with an interest in the hall to join in at their AGM on Wednesday 17th May.

"Everyone's welcome: come and meet, speak and have a cuppa with us, get an idea what we do and what new projects we are undertaking," said a spokesman.

"Have you got what it takes to be part of the running the hall, whether having an active role or just would like to add your opinions? we need fresh members and fresh ideas? Do pop along, we are a friendly bunch!"

For more info, call 0770 6383 099 or 0121 445 4022

They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!
Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village.Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechurch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green. The next film on 18th May the showing will be Walt Disney's delightful film: a wily old codger matches wits with the King of the Leprechauns and helps play matchmaker for his daughter. Upcoming events include Pressed leaves & Beeswax Art Exhibition on 1 June, 10am – 4pm/ 2nd June, 2pm – 4pm which will be introduced to us by international award-winning nature artist, Hui-Ying Chang from Taiwan.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. Info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact paul_and_carrol@live.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time. On Wednesday 15 May there will be a talk by Dr Richard Comont from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust at Alvechurch Village Hall at 7.30pm. A night at the races will be held on Sat 15th June at 7pm. The AVS end of season social event with indoor horse racing. Please note that the date for this was incorrect in the printed programme. Tickets will be on sale soon; details will follow by email and local adverts.
REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for more: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers providing a range of support - from friendship and practical help - for all refugees and asylum seekers moving into the district. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious beliefs, and new volunteers are always needed. More info at brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, book in advance www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk.

continues overleaf

continued from previous page

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. For more info www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Burcot Grange. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB meets on 8th May at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm. They will have a talk by Vanessa Morgan "Stories Grandad Told". It will be interesting to hear Vanessa's own family stories. Perhaps everyone has been told some of the same little "nuggets" of information. Please come along and join in, then enjoy a good chat afterwards with other members over a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit. If you have any queries or questions or queries please phone either Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. Please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker–, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

BARNT GREEN WATERS LIMITED are hosting a Club Open Day at Upper Bittell on Saturday 11th May 11am to 4pm for those who may be interested in becoming members of the either the Fishing Club or Sailing Club, or to enjoy the natural surroundings of the estate. Full details about the Open Day can be seen on pages 28-29.

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com. There are a number of walks coming up, the next walk will be held on 5 May at 2pm, which will be a walk from the Coach and Horses, led by Alan and Linda Helmore. Meet at the Coach and Horses, Weatheroak, B48 7EA. The following walk will be on Sun 2nd June at 2pm led by Cheryl Godfrey 07898 951099, A Walk from St. Michael's Church. Meet at St. Michael's Church car park B45 8BD

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties contact: barntgreenfishingclub@gmail.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

MEDITATION CLASSES for Everyone. Come and try a KIND approach to Meditation and experience for yourself the revitalising power of a relaxed, calm, clear mind, whether beginner or experienced practitioner. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, online or a mixture. REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER, SLEEP BETTER. To join us for a trail contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F Sally My Yoga Mind

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailing-barntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue—classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

BIODIVERSITY WALKS

Mary Green's next biodiversity walks are on Friday 24 May and Tuesday 28 May at 10.30am. These are slow easy walks to look at areas of good habitat for wildlife around Alvechurch. Meet outside The Crown Inn, Withybed Green. The walk takes about two hours.
No need to book: just turn up. For more information contact alvbiodiv@gmail.com

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground. Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @ longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus (reformer/ tower / barrels etc.) 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years. Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk or call on 07828 515344 for more information.

YOGA for Every-Body. Come and try a fresh approach to Yoga, that works with your body rather than against it. A slow-paced, yet powerful Yoga for EveryBody, whether beginner or experienced, flexible or wishing you were. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, Blackwell First School, online or a mixture. MOVE BETTER, BE CALMER, FEEL GREAT! To trial a class, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri

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evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact Membership Secretary kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For more information call Lorraine 07866877881

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 7.15pm. On Thursday 9th May 2024 they welcome speaker Helen Picton. Helen is third generation of Picton's to run Old Court Nurseries & The Picton Garden in Colwall and co-author of the book "The Plant Lovers Guide to Asters'. Asters or Michaelmas daisies are her speciality but a love of all plants has been key to the continued growth and success of the nursery and garden. Guests are welcome £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 07843758489 .

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." They are meeting on 1 May – for details and more information contact marygreen5005@gmail.com.

AN ART RETREAT WITH JANE ASTON will be introduced at Barnt Green Travel Lounge on Thursday 16th March 7 - 8.30pm. Wine and nibbles will be available. To find out more details email jane@janeastonstudios.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroftarts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is an art course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of enthusiastic local stitchers, both experienced and beginners. They meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. They are a leisure learning and development group exploring various techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for more information.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesdays. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

STAY & PLAY for under 5s and their carers running each Thursday from 9:30-11:30am during term time at Barnt Green Baptist Church, Bittel Road. Just pop along for play, singing & story time. Email familypastoral@bgb.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcrosswi.org or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday every month between April and November, and at 12pm December to March, at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence (01527 822622)or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susanbarratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

ROWNEY GREEN VILLAGE HALL has a large hall, with stage and sprung floor (ideal for dance and exercise) and two smaller rooms. Available for one off or regular hire, ample parking. Email: admin@rowneygreenvillagehall.org

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY HALL is available for groups, functions and parties. The large hall is complemented by a new kitchen and a grassed area. Details at blackwellcommunityhall.co.uk.

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

The deadline for submissions for the June issue of *The Village* is 10 May 2024. Please email: info@villageonline.co.uk

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